

# Letter: A True Connecticut Fish Story

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To the Editor:

Before we moved to Easton 22 years ago we lived in Norwalk where I made friends with Charlie Toth, an elderly neighbor who had grown up in Norwalk where his father had managed what he called “the poor farm” for indigent people.

A lifelong Norwalk resident, Charlie owned and operated Toth’s Service Station for 22 years until his retirement. What he loved to do most was go out and fish before sunrise on Long Island Sound off of the Norwalk Islands. That’s where, in 1979, Charlie hauled in an enormous bluefish, weighing 24 lbs., 13 ounces. It’s still on the books as the largest bluefish ever caught in Connecticut waters - and may be the state’s oldest unbeaten salt-water fishing record.

Charlie lived in a very modest house and never squandered a dime of what he had earned from his gas station. One day, he showed me a postcard mailer he had received from a Norwalk lawyer and asked me to go meet this lawyer with him, and if we found him to be “on the up and up” Charlie would ask him to write his will so that when he died he could leave everything to the Norwalk Maritime Aquarium and the Norwalk Seaport Association.

Charlie and I found the lawyer to our liking, a straightforward straight-talking fellow named Mickey Koleszar with a modest 2nd floor office in downtown Norwalk. He and Mickey ended up writing the will.

Charlie died a couple of years later in 2007, and \$950,000 was left to the Maritime Aquarium and \$950,000 to the Norwalk Seaport Association — with a plaque in the Maritime Aquarium reading “In Memory of Charles J. Toth - A lifetime friend of Long Island Sound” and one in the Sheffield Island Lighthouse reading “In Memory of Charles J. Toth - A lifetime friend of The Norwalk Islands.”

The very attentive Mickey Koleszar made sure that he and I were both on board with how each of these beneficiaries intended to spend their bequests. The Aquarium would create a glass “Schooling Bunker” aquarium exhibit where people could sit in comfortable padded seats in the dark and zone out watching the bunker fish slowly, mystically swimming in a tight circle. (Bunker are, ironically, the favorite bait fish for bluefish.) In another area of the Norwalk Aquarium was an exhibit devoted to Long Island Sound fishing which they called “Go Fish.”

The Seaport Association used their funds to restore the Sheffield Island Lighthouse and buy a tour boat to shuttle tourists back and forth to the lighthouse from their Norwalk River dock near the Maritime Aquarium. They named the boat C.J. TOTH QUEST.

Charlie was a very modest, keep to himself, under the radar type of fellow, but I felt that his gift should be acknowledged so I wrote a press release describing it along with the story of his record Bluefish catch which resulted in it being published in local newspapers.

Now, I make it a point to go to the annual Long Island Sound Bluefish Tournament in August and go on the radio where they broadcast the tournament from Captain’s Cove in Bridgeport and tell the Charlie Toth record bluefish and philanthropy stories. I hope I don’t run into Charlie in the afterlife. He might give me an earful for publicizing it.

Grant Monsarrat

Easton